

Thomas Jefferson to Abraham Bishop, November 13, 1808, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO ABRAHAM BISHOP J. MSS.

Washington, Nov. 13, 08.

Sir, —Not knowing whether Colo. Humphreys would be at present at or in the neighborhood of New Haven, or in Boston, I take the liberty of addressing a request to yourself. Homespun is become the spirit of the times: I think it an useful one, & therefore that it is a duty to encourage it by example. The best fine cloth made in the U. S. is, I am told, at the manufacture of Colo. Humphreys in your neighborhood. Could I get the favor of you to procure me there as much of his best as would make me a coat. I should prefer a deep blue, but, if not to be had, then a black. Some person coming on in the stage can perhaps be found who would do me the favor of taking charge of it. The amount shall be remitted to you the moment you shall be so kind as to notify it to me, or paid to any member of the legislature here whom yourself or Colonel Humphreys' agent shall indicate. Having so little acquaintance in or near New Haven, I hope you will pardon the liberty I take in proposing this trouble to you towards which the general motive will perhaps avail something. I salute you with esteem & respect.¹

¹ Jefferson later wrote to Colonel Humphreys:

“ Washington, January 20, 1809.

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“ Sir,—I have to acknowledge the receipt of your favor of December 12th, and to return you my thanks for the cloth furnished me. came in good time, and does honor to your manufactory, being as good as any one would wish to wear in any country. Amidst the pressure of evils with which the belligerent edicts have afflicted us, some permanent good will arise; the spring given to manufactures will have durable effects. Knowing most of my own State, I can affirm with confidence that were free intercourse opened again to-morrow, she would never again import one-half of the coarse goods which she has done down to the date of the edicts. These will be made in our families. For finer goods we must resort to the larger manufactories established in the towns. Some jealousy of this spirit of manufacture seems excited among commercial men. It would have been as just when we first began to make our own ploughs and hoes. They have certainly lost the profit of bringing these from a foreign country. My idea is that we should encourage home manufactures to the extent of our own consumption of everything of which we raise the raw material. I do not think it fair in the ship-owners to say we ought not to make our own axes, nails, &c., here, that they may have the benefit of carrying the iron to Europe, and bringing back the axes, nails, &c. Our agriculture will still afford surplus produce enough to employ a due proportion of navigation. Wishing every possible success to your undertaking, as well for your personal as the public benefit, I salute you with assurances of great esteem and respect.”